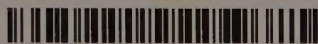


COLLECTED ESSAYS



KT-590-576

COLLECTED
ESSAYS PAPERS &c.
of
ROBERT BRIDGES

IV
A CRITICAL
INTRODUCTION
TO KEATS

Oxford University Press
HUMPHREY MILFORD
LONDON
1929

WITHDRAWN
HARVARD
COLLEGE

57653

xiii. e. 42.

Printed in Great Britain

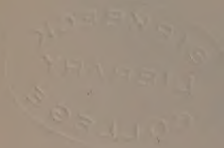


TABLE OF THE NEW SYMBOLS USED

- (1) *a* = the *a* of *father* (this is the true Romance *A*).
a = the *a* of *hat*.
- (2) *a'* = the *a* in *almighty*.
- (3) *av* = the same sound which occurs as *au* or *aw* in *autumn* and *awl*.
- (4) *ε* = the *e* of *bed*. Only used so far in needful alleviation of wrong use of *a*.
- (5) *a* or (6) *y* = the *a* of *slave*. This symbol is made by a ligature of the two vowels which compose the sound; viz. the *ε* of *bed* and the *i* of *in*, as they appear in the words *rein* and *they*: such correctly spelt words are of course left unchanged. The modification of this sound before *r*, as in *various*, will be a rule of pronunciation, as also the effect of *qu* and *w* on the following vowel, e.g. *war*, etc., are unchanged.
- (9) *ĭ* for the diphthongal sound in *eye* and *right*.
- (10) *av* as in *how*.
- (14) *o* as in *oh*.

TABLE OF THE

(15) *g* 'hard' *G*.

(16) *ŋ* for the modified *n* in *-ing*.

Note: The reader is reminded that inconsistencies must occur in avoiding the confusion which would arise from using the symbols in words which require other new symbols to complete them. Such words are left in their old dress until they can be completely provided. Also note that the final *e* which is always mute, except in a few foreign words, is omitted where its presence would wrongly imply the lengthening of the preceding vowel, as in *liv*, *hav*, *passag*, *colleg*, but note *depreciate*, where *a* is long. This simple advantage cannot be made use of in words where the preceding vowel is mis-spelt, as in *dove*.

Capitals are not dealt with and illustrative quotations are given in the original spelling.

Any oversights in the text will not affect the purpose of the experiment.

Proper names unchanged: but the correct *a* is generally used, as in *Peona*, as it will not be remarked by the reader.

Mute *e* in past participles represented by an

NEW SYMBOLS USED

apostroph not only in *remember'd*, etc., but now also in *attē'r'd*, *compos'd*, *dār'd*, *denȳ'd*, etc.

u omitted after *g*, when mute, as *disgȳse*.

N.B. *through* spelt *thru'*

though „ *tho'*

thought „ *thavht*

because unalter'd.

IV

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO KEATS

FIRST PRINTED

*John Keats. A Critical Essay. Written for the
Muses Library (Keats) and sold separately in a
limited edition (250)*

Lawrence & Bullen 1895

REPRINTED AND REVISED

Poetical Works of John Keats

Hodder & Stoughton

1916

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

I

IF one English poet might be recall'd to-day from the dead to continue the work which he left unfinish'd on earth, it is probable that the crown of his country's desire would be set on the head of John Keats, for he was smitten down in his youth, in the very maturin^g of powers, which, havin^g already produced work of almost unrivall'd beauty, held a promis of incredible things.

Had his marvellous genius fully matured, it is impossible to surmise what Keats might not have done: but concernin^g the poetry that he has actually left us, the general verdict is that, while the best of it is of the highest excellence, the most of it is disappointin^g. Nor is this judgment likely to be upset, altho' some may always unreservedly admire him on account of his excellences,—and this because his fault is often the excess of a good and rare quality,—and others again as unreservedly depreciate him on account of that very want of restraint, which in his early work, besides its other immaturities, is often of such a nature as to be offensiv to good taste and very provocativ of impatient condemnation.

KEATS

Among Keats' poems, too, a quantity of indifferent and bad verse is now printed, not only from a reverence for his first volume, which he never revîs'd, and which is very properly reprinted as he issued it, but also from a feeling, which editors hav had, that since enythin, might be of value, everythin, was; so that eny scrap of his which could be recover'd has gon into the collections. Concernin, which poor stuff we may be consol'd to know that Keats himself would hav had no care; for, not to speak of what was plainly never intended for poetry at all, he seems to hav regarded at least his earlier work as a mere product of himself and the circumstances, now good now bad, its quality dependin, on influences beyond his control and often adverse, under which he always did his best. On one point only was he sensitiv, and that was his belief that he sometimes did well, and would do better. The feilures he left as they were, havin, too much pride to be asham'd of them, and too stron, a conviction of an ever-flowin, and, as he felt, an increasin, and betterin, inspiration, to think it worth while to spend fresh time in revîsin, what a younger moment had cast off.

The purpos of this essay is to examin Keats' more important poems bî the highest standard of excellence as works of art, in such a manner as may be both useful and

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

interesting; to investigate their construction, and by naming the faults to distinguish their beauties, and set them in an approximate order of merit; also, by exhibiting his method, to vindicate both the form and meaning of some poems from the assumption of even his reasonable admirers that they have neither one nor other. Within the limits of an introductory chapter this cannot be done, even imperfectly, without omitting much which the reader may look for in an account of Keats' poetry, but such omissions can be easily supplied: a knowledge, too, of the circumstances of Keats' life will be assumed,¹ and some acquaintance with his letters to his friends; and since these make of themselves a most charming book, and one that can never be superseded as a commentary on his work in its personal aspect, this view of the subject will here be disregarded except when required to aid the criticism or interpretation of a poem.

I shall take the poems in what seems the most convenient order for my purpose, and shall not trouble the reader with any other artificial connection, reserving general remarks till the end. The worse pieces I shall not notice at all.

¹Mr. Sidney Colvin's *Life of Keats*, in the *English Men of Letters* series, supplies all these desiderata most satisfactorily.

II.

ENDYMION

ENDYMION is Keats' longest poem. It is the story of how Cynthia, the moon-goddess, who is also herself the moon, fell in love with the mortal Endymion. 'A great trial of invention', wrote Keats, for he had 'to fill 4000 lines with one bare circumstance.' When he compos'd the poem, he was in a state of mental excitement varied by fits of depression; he grew tir'd of it, had a poor opinion of it, and in his preface describ'd it as a feverish attempt.

To one who expects to be carried on by the interest of a story, this poem is tedious and unreadable, and parts of it merit at least some of the condemnation which fell on the whole. Keats thavht to 'surprise by a fine excess'; his excess rather confuses and blurs, and it is a severe task to keep the attention fix'd. A want of definition in the actual narration,—so that important matters do not stand out,—a same-ness in the variety, and the reiteration of languid epithets, are the chief cause of this; and in the second book, where Endymion is wanderin, in strange places, the uncertainty as to where he is, in the absence of explanatory

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

statement as to what is intended, reduces the reader to despair. And yet it is a marvel how even such faults as these can have obscured so completely the poetic excellences from a more general recognition. I shall give a short analysis of the outward events of the poem, such as the reader may find useful both as a guide and for reference or index, and will add some explanation of the allegory. But first with respect to the allegory I would say this, that the minor characters and incidents are so numerous and so yielding to various interpretation, that for the sake of brevity and simplicity I must confine myself to the main points, without which there is no sense in the whole; and since, even with these, the mere putting their explanation into definite statement cannot be done without throwing the whole temporarily out of focus, I am the more content to neglect those lesser matters, in which the poet should be regarded as having, in his own words, 'let himself go from some fine starting-point towards his own originality'; nor would I wish to represent the poem other than he meant it, 'a little region in which lovers of poetry may wander' at their will.

ANALYSIS OF ENDYMION

BOOK I.—ON THE EARTH

1. **Author's prolog*, 1-62.
2. *Festival of Pan on Latmos*, 63-406. [*Endymion enters*, 168; **Ode to Pan*, 232-306.]
3. *Peona takes E. to her bower*, 407-515. [*Address to Sleep*, 453-463.] *E. tells of his vision of an unknown goddess among the poppies—he dreamt he was asleep*, 516-710. *Peona rallies him on his love*, 710-768. *E. replies with his *argument on the meaning of Love*, 769-857, and *gives an account of a second*, 893, and *third*, 963, *meeting with the same vision, to end of book*.

BOOK II.—WANDERINGS UNDER THE EARTH

1. **Prolog on supremacy of love above heroism, etc.*, 1-43.
2. *E., while enjoying the pleasures of nature, reads a message on a butterfly's wings*, 43-63. *The butterfly leads him to a nymph, who foretells his wanderings and ultimate success*, 64-130. *E. meditates on the disappointment of desire, and prays to Cynthia as his especial goddess, but not recognis'd as his visitant; and receives answer bidding him descend into the silent mysteries of earth*, 131-214.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

He obeys, 218. Description of an underworld of gems, 219-280. E. feels horror of solitude, and wishes to return to the earth. He comes to a temple of Diana, his goddess, and prays Diana to deliver him from the underworld, 281-332. Flowers spring out of the marble, 333-350. He goes on to soft music, 351-363. Is tortured by the music, 364-375. Comes to a lightsome wood of myrtles, 376-386.

3. Description of Adonis, 387-427. The waking of Adonis, 428-533. Venus encourages E., and enjoins secrecy, 534-587.

4. E. follows a diamond balustrade thru' waterworks to a gloom where he sees Cybele, 588-649. Balustrade breaks off, and he goes on an eagle to a jasmin bower, where he soliloquises, 649-706. Cynthia comes unknown to him in bower, 707-827, and leaves him asleep, 853.

[*The poet speaks of the mystery of his legend, 827-853.]

5. E. wakes to melancholy thought, and strays to a grotto where he sees Alpheus and Arethusa—he prays for them, 854-1017. He goes altogether under the sea, 1023.

BOOK III.—UNDER THE SEA

1. *Prolog on regalities and supremacy of the Moon, 1-71.

KEATS

2. A moonbeam reaches E. under sea, 72-102, and shines on him till mornin, 102-119. [Description of sea-floor, 119-141.] [*Address to the Moon, 142-187.]

3. He meets with Glaucus and Scylla, 187-1027. Neptune's hall, 866-887. Venus cheers E., 887-923. Neptune's feast, 924-937. Hymn to Neptune, 943-990. Nereids carry off E., 1005-1018. E. hears a heavenly voice promising to take him up, 1019-1027.

4. E. finds himself back on the earth, 1028-1032.

BOOK IV.—IN THE AIR

1. Prolog to English Muse, 1-29.

2. E. finds a beautiful Indian mayd beweilin her loneliness. He falls in love with her, 30-330. [Her son, 146-290.] And accompanies her in the air on flin, horses, 330. *Vision of sleep journeyin, 367-397. E. and Indian sleep on the sleepin horses, 398. Cynthia appears to E. as the Moon, 430. The Indian disappears, -512. *Cave of quietude describ'd, 512-562. Diana's feast and hymn to D., 563-611.

3. In midst of hymn E. is borne to Latmos agein, and finds thare and addresses the Indian lady, 611-797. [The poet speaks, 770-780.]

4. Peona reappears, and by the identification of the

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Moon, Cynthia, and the Indian lady as one, the tale concludes, 1003.

In so far as the poem has an inner meaning, Endymion must be identified with the poet as Man. The Moon represents 'Poetry' or the Ideality of desired objects, the principle of Beauty in all things: it is the supersensuous quality which makes all desired objects ideal; and Cynthia, as moon-goddess, crowns and personifies this, representing the ideal beauty or love of woman: and in so far as she is also actually the Moon as well as the Indian lady,—who clearly represents real or sensuous passion,—it follows that the love of woman is in its essence the same with all love of beauty; and this proposition and its converse will explain much that is otherwise strange and difficult.

Man in Keats' poem begins with a desire for excellence, renown, and fame, and connects the Moon with his passion, iii. 142 seq., that is, he sees beauty or 'poetry' or ideality in his desire. This Ideality, assuming the form of the goddess, that is, of woman, which it is,¹ makes him renounce ambition and pursue poetic love. Next he has to humanise the ideality of his passion; and this

¹The absolute identification must be intended in iv. 430, etc.

KEATS

comes about by his contact with the mystery of life, and by sympathy with dead lovers' tragedies; and this sympathy leaves him a prey to real sensuous passion. In this he falls, as he thinks, from his faith; and his sensuous passion, coming into sudden contact with his old ideals, vanishes at one moment quite away, and leaves him a prey to utter despair, iv. 507 seq.; and he is at discord with himself, until he unexpectedly discovers that his real and ideal loves are one and the same.

The circumstance that ideal beauty, if it is the Moon, is represented as falling in love with man, merely implies selection or election, and narrows down the application of the allegory to those men who feel supernatural visitations (End. i. 795), such as are the Visionaries of the Revision of *Hyperion*. Also, to follow Keats' meaning, it must not be lost sight of that when Endymion is visited by Cynthia, he never recognises her to be the Moon,¹ altho' her advent was heralded by 'the loveliest moon', etc., i. 591. The identity is not reveal'd to him till Book IV. 430, etc.; and so, when he finds himself loving both Cynthia and the Indian lady at the same time, he remembers his first love, the Moon, as distinct from them, and says that

¹See i. 606, 894, 943-959; ii. 128, esp. 168-195, and 302-332, 576, esp. 686 seq., and 739, 753; iii. 175, etc., 913-914.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

he has a triple soul. There is no doubt about this, and it seems to me one of the two keys to the allegory. That it has escap'd the attention of diligent readers is a proof that it is not insisted on with sufficient clearness in the poem, and it is a good example of the lack of definition in the presentation of Keats' main designs.

Keats was not making an allegory, but using a legend, Symbolism and he never, so far as I know, stated that he intended his of the poem for an allegory (unless this is implied in ii. 838-9), Moon so that it may naturally shock the reader to find the Moon identified with such an abstraction as the principle of beauty in all things. But as a matter of fact, the symbolism may be arrived at in the simplest way: the poet was very sensible to the mysterious effects of moonlight,¹ and felt the poetry of nature more deeply under that influence; and, that mood being given, one step further only is necessary, which is that other ecstatic and poetic moods should

¹And see Wordsworth's two Odes to the Moon:

O still beloved! for thine, meek Power, are charms
That fascinate the very babe in arms.

And, better, Guy de Maupassant:

'Pourquoi ces frissons de cœur, cette émotion de l'âme? . . . A qui étaient destinés ce spectacle sublime, cette abondance de poésie jetée du ciel sur la terre? . . . Dieu peut-être a fait ces nuits-là pour voiler d'idéal les amours des hommes.'

KEATS

be liken'd to it, and the conditionin^g cause of the first, which is known, be taken for a symbol of the other unknown causes, or of that which is common to all. This is, I think, the other chief key to the sense, and it makes the difficult passag in End. iii. 142-187 (and see especially lines 163-169) intelligible and plain; and the poem becomes, with these explanations, readable as a whole, suggestiv of meanin^g, and full of shadowy outlin^{es} of mysterious truth.

Scheme of the Poem The general scheme of the poem is braud and simple. The four books, followin^g the common formula of mystic initiation 'by the terrors of Fire, of Water and Air' (see the Analysis), correspond with the four elements—I. Earth; II. Fire—for it is more probable that this element has been somewhat obscured in the 'gleaming melancholy' of its necessary modifications than that it was not intended in its proper home beneath the earth's crust;¹ III. Under sea = Water; IV. Air; and these typif^y respectively—I. Natural beauty; II. The mysteries of earth; III. The secrets of death; IV. Spiritual freedom and satisfaction. The first idea needs little comment: the last three books are concern'd with states of mind which, on his own con-

¹See the initial description, in which Vulcan is mention'd, II. 231, and the grat use of gems.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

fession, lay beyond the poet's experience; and here he must be regarded as a searcher for truth rather than as full prophet. What the mysteries of earth are will appear in the explanation of Sleep and Poetry. Their region 'beneath in the earth' is moonless, i.e., unlovely, and oppresses Endymion with the horror of solitude; but even here he finds a cold shrine to Diana and immortal bowers of beauty; and at last the mysteries flush into love, and he holds unexpected communion with Cynthia herself. After this 'the blank amazements amaze no more', and he meets with Alpheus and Arethusa. The reason for the choice of this legend is very clear; they are two lovers, who, like Endymion himself, have left the earth, and are pursuing their passion underground, whence they are destin'd, as he too is, to arrive again at the upper æer thru' the sea. So in the third book the story of Glaucus and Scylla has a similar fitness. Glaucus is a mortal, who, of his own curiosity and instinctive desire, has plung'd stryght into the 'secrets of Death' from the world of natural beauty, where he was living on the brink of them. Scylla may have done the same; but the general meaning of this third book I am not at all able to supply. The region is one where the moonbeams can reach, and the phenomena of earth's day and night are dimly seen. The secrets of Death are in some

KEATS

way connected with magic, of which there are two kinds—the first, the earthly magic or witchcraft of Circe, who is 'arbitrary queen of sense', and can gratify the sense but not resolve the secrets of Death, whose evil power she seems rather to eid; and the second a serious magic, which Glaucus has to learn before he can win redemption from Circe's curse. The meaning of the secrets of Death is probably the same as the imagination in Rev. of Hyperion (q.v.), but whether Glaucus is a visionary who lives entirely in the past (see End. iii. 327-337, 122, etc.), or whether Death has a more realistic meaning, or whether, as is not impossible, the two ideas are combin'd, I cannot guess. It seems intended that the sorrow of the secrets of Death can only be surmounted and their magic resolved by a soul who
Idea of *has been in perfect communion with ideal beauty, and has*
woman *traced her presence thru' the whole of creation. This episode of Glaucus and Scylla, bk. iii from line 188 onwards, may be omitted at first reading, and it must always, tho' most consecutiv in narration, please the least, even tho' a key should be found for it. Of the four books, of almost equal length, the fourth reads by far the shortest.*

As for the beauties of the poem, they are innumerable, and the reader will find them for himself, if he will be patient with the defects that so curiously hide them. Of these I

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

would say no more here, if they did not very many of them depend on a lamentable deficiency in Keats' art, which, while it affects much of his work, is brought into unusual prominence by the subject of *Endymion*; and that is his very superficial and unworthy treatment of his ideal female characters. It may be partly accounted for thus: Keats' art is primarily objective and pictorial, and whatever other qualities it has are as it were added on to things as perceived; and this requires a satisfactory pictorial basis, which, in the case of ideal woman, did not exist in Keats' time. Neither the Greek nor the Renaissance ideals were understood, and the thin convention of classicism, which we may see in the works of West and Canova, was played out; so that the rising artists, and Keats with them, finding 'nothing to be intense upon', turned to nature, and produced from English models the domestic-belle type, which ruled throughout the second quarter of the century, degrading our poets as well as painters. It was banal, and the more ideal and abstract it sought to be, the more empty it became; so that it was the portrait-painters only, like Lawrence, who, having to do with individual expression of subjective qualities, escaped from the meanness, and represented women whom we can still admire. Now Keats was clearly in a predicament from which neither circumstances

KEATS

nor disposition provided him an escape. The social condition of his parents probably excluded him from contact with the best types, and he seems to have had some idiosyncrasy. He deplores in one of his letters that he was not at ease in women's society; and when he attributes this to their not answering to his preconception of them, it looks as if he were seeking his ideal among them. Certainly what appears to be the delineation of his conception often offends taste without raising the imagination, and it reveals a plainly impossible foundation for dignified passion, in the representation of which Keats failed, as we shall see later. I conclude that he supposed that common expressions became spiritualised by being applied to an idea. Whatever praise is given to Keats' work must always be with this reservation; and he generally does his best where there is no opportunity for this kind of fault. There are exceptions, and these are, as one would expect, among the more personally inspired poems; for such sonnets as Time's Sea, I cry your Mercy, Bright Star, though perhaps not quite untinged by this weakness if interpreted by the rest of his work, are yet, if considered alone, above reproach.

This ideal carries much better his other more homely type of woman, represented to him by his sister-in-law, who was no doubt the model of Peona, a lady who has no

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

aspirations after the moon; a simple nature which he grew to value even more, of which in the revised Hyperion he says—

They seek no wonder but the human face,

No music but a happy-noted voice.

And it must be remember'd that his behaviour towards his own younger sister was a pattern of brotherliness and natural affection, full of sympathy, chivalry, devotion, and common-sense.

III.

THE SHORT ENDYMION AND SLEEP AND POETRY.

'I stood tiptoe' THE first poem in Keats' first volume, *'I stood tiptoe upon a little hill'*, must be consider'd in relation to *Endymion*, for *'Endymion'* was its original title, and it may be regarded as a prelude to the longer poem. It was written in December 1816, and was more work'd at¹ than one might suppose from what Keats tells us of his habits at that time. The argument of the poem, tho' much disguised by its objectiv manner, is carefully elaborated. It begins with a description of Nature as seen in a walk in the then suburbs of London—already romantically remote from us—and from this passes insensibly to other descriptions of Nature, with incidental reference to the new school of poetry, which promises to celebrate Nature (51, etc.). Then (l. 94 seq.), in an unfortunat passag, mayden beauty intrudes, and then (113) the moon

Coming into the blue with all her light.

And this moon is the same symbol as in the long poem—

O Maker of sweet poets! dear delight
Of this fair world . . .

¹Letters, iv.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

*Lover of loneliness and wandering,
Of upcast eye.*

And then (125) follows a poetic statment of the inspiration of poetry by Nature, which is unique in its bold and fanciful identification of versification with natural forms, e.g. 1. 127—

In the calm grandeur of a sober line

We see the waving of the mountain-pine, etc.

He then suggests that this ecstasy in Nature may have given origin not only to the music of verse, but to the poetic ideas of such myths as Psyche, Syrinx, and Narcissus, and lastly (181) of Endymion, asserting his preference for that tale, and his wish to write it; and the poem ends (210-242) with a passage of human sympathy, as the direct effect of the marriage of Endymion and Cynthia.

This will give some notion of Keats' poetic method, but sleep and I will take one other poem to illustrate it, the last in the Poetry first volume, call'd sleep and Poetry; and it is conveniently group'd here, because, like the one just noticed, it is in the same metre as Endymion, and both are good examples of Keats' early style.¹ They often fall into a

¹Concerning the versification of Endymion there is no reason to repeat objections which were evident from the first to their *Serene Cæcities* the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood*, but some remarks will be found under *Lamia*, and on p. 152 seq.

KEATS

feeble manner, and they never rise to his full height, but here and there, especially in single lines, they do touch on it, and, quite apart from their inner meaning, have a beauty worthy of their author, and are very pleasant reading.

Sleep and Poetry is crowded with meaning. The short analysis of it is thus. Sleep, which figures the unawaken'd state of mind,¹ is praised for its gentle soothing and inspiring qualities (1-18, and cf. End. i. 453 seq.) but subordinated to Poetry, which reveals more (19-34). Poetry, which represents the mind awaken'd to mystery, inspires with ambition and confidence (-40).

Keats then states his own devotion to Poetry (47-55), and prays to her for inspiration to penetrate the mysteries of Nature and human life (-84). He doubts whether fate will grant him length of life, and gives images of life which bring him back to a picture of the state of mind describ'd in the opening lines of the poem (85-95).

Then in an important passage (101-162) he states the spheres of emotion thru' which this poetic love of Nature will carry him. Then (162-235) follow the well-known invective against the Augustan school, and his prophecy of the coming revival; and at 235 a definition of the true object

¹As pointed out by Mrs. F. M. Owen in *Keats: A Study*, Kegan Paul, 1880—an important book in the history of the criticism of Keats' genius.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

of poetry, to comfort mankind; implying sympathy with human misery. The rest of the poem, 270 to end, is his peroration to his first publication, an apology for presumption, a determination to write, a tribute to the sympathetic support of his friends, a description of his refuge in Leigh Hunt's study, and he ends his book saying of his verses—

Howsoever they be done,

I leave them as a father does his son.

This argument seems consecutive enough, but the passage 101-162 requires explanation. The meaning of it is exactly the same with that of Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey. In that poem Wordsworth distinguishes three states of mind following by development one on another; 1st, boyhood—mere animal pleasure; 2nd, passionate ecstasy in Nature; 3rd, reflective pleasure in Nature, i.e., pleasure accompanied by or inwoven with that spiritual insight into the mystery which it is the object of his poem to exhibit. Now Keats, in a letter to Reynolds, May 1818,¹ refers to these lines on Tintern Abbey, and sets out his own ideas in the following language:—

‘I compare human life to a large Mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step

¹Letters, lii.

KEATS

into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness, and Oppression—whereby this Chamber of Maiden-Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the balance of good and evil—we are in a mist—we are now in that state—We feel the "burden of the Mystery".

'To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote "Tintern Abbey", and it seems

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages.'

I do not think that any one who knows Keats' letters would suppose that he was merely borrowing from Wordsworth, but there is no objection to supposing that he may have learnt some of his obstinate questionings from that master, though he thought out the answers for himself. The sense in the two poems is, however, identical, and it will repay us to examine the extreme difference between Keats' objective treatment and Wordsworth's philosophising. For instance, here is Wordsworth's description of what Keats calls the infant or thoughtless chamber—

The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
And their glad animal movements.

Keats speaks directly of this first state in the opening lines of his poem, and incidentally (l. 93), though not without full contrastive purpose, he puts it at the end of his images of human life, where 'knowledge is sorrow, sorrow is wisdom, and wisdom is folly'. These images are of life considered first as a mere atomic movement in a general flux, then as a dream on the brink of destruction, then as a budding hope, then as an intellectual distraction, then as an ecstatic glimpse of beauty, and lastly as an instinctive animal pleasure.

KEATS

The whole passag is thus—

*Stop and consider! Life is but a day;
A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way
From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep
While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan?
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;
The reading of an everchanging tale;
The light up-lifting of a maiden's veil;
A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;
A laughing schoolboy, without grief or care,
Riding the springy branches of an elm.*

Now the last three lines correspond exactly in meaning with the two lines of Wordsworth quoted just above; and the different methods of the two poets are plainly exhibited. The abstract interpretation which I have given of the whole passag quoted from Keats may serve for a further illustration.

Of the Second Chamber Wordsworth's lines will serve the general purpose of this essay, as giving an excellent plain description of Keats' mental condition when he wrote most of his earlier poetry—

*The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,*

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

*The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, etc. (Cp. End. iii. 142, etc.)*

*And when they both describe the Third Chamber here are
the parallel passages: Wordsworth has—*

*And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.*

And Keats has—

*Lo, I see afar,
O'er-sailing the blue cragginess, a car
And steeds with streamy manes—the charioteer
Looks out upon the winds with furious fear:
And now the numerous tramlings quiver lightly
Along a huge cloud's ridge; and now with sprightly*

KEATS

Wheel downward come they into fresher skies.

And now I see them on a green-hill's side
 In breezy rest among the nodding stalks.
 The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks
 To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear
 Shapes of delight, of mystery. . . .
 Most awfully intent
 The driver of those steeds is forward bent
 And seems to listen.

It is impossible to read Wordsworth's statement without seeing his meaning. Keats' poetry is as obscure as the 'dark passages' themselves; but it is a definitely aimed attempt to express a definitely conceived thought in poetical terms. If the imagery fails to define the poet's thought, it must be remembered that definition is neither desired nor sought; and if there does lie behind Keats' poetry a meaning which it is impossible to make absolutely distinct in his objective manner, then it is not strange that his poetry should attract many who have to confess that they do not entirely understand it.

Poetry of Nature There must be thousands and thousands of persons alive at this moment in England, who, if they could only give poetic expression to those mysterious feelings with which

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

they are moved in the presence of natural beauty, would be one and all of them grater poets than have ever yet been; but this objectiv presentation of ecstatic moods is only given in rare touches, and seems to be the reward of consummat art. The old simile, which in the Iliad is seldom more than an ornament used to enliven the description in an almost barbaric taste, may be used for a device to secure something of this evasiv wonder. The poet having put his reader into the fit mood, then thrusts a natural picture before him, which is seen by him from the human or mysterious point of view; for instance, in *Hyperion*, the exquisit passag—

Like a dismal cirque

Of Druid stones upon a forlorn moor,
When the chill rain begins at shut of eve
In dull November, and their chancel vault,

The heaven itself, is blinded throughout night,
is not so much a heighten^{ing} of the picture of those old monstrous gods, lying out 'at random, carelessly diffused,'—which is its excuse and opportunity,—so much as it is a glorify^{ing} of the mystery of Stonehenge¹ and the forlorn moor, the poetry of which is seized at once by the reader, whose mood has been created for him by the story.

¹It was not actually Stonehenge that Keats was thinking of, but the smaller Druid circle near Keswick.

KEATS

Nothing can exceed the force of such a reserved method as this. The intention is artistically conceal'd by the very means which are taken to prepare the effect, and the picture bursts unexpectedly on the reader with all the force of a landscape seen suddenly upon reaching the brow of a hill. But it is of course much more difficult to picture ideas than moods. The purely objectiv picturing of an idea in poetry is very like a musical presentation; and as instrumental music can give a mood, but cannot be trusted to suggest the simplest idea without the interpretation of words or action either accompanying or preparing it, so the poetic picture requires a statement of its intention; and even then it seems as vague in itself as music, because it would equally well picture some other intentions. Keats gives a statement of the intention of his charioteer in 123-125 and 157, and also by a few words in the picture; yet it must be confess'd that he is not quite successful; and if it may be said that in Wordsworth the statement is overdone, and that what fine poetry there is, is swamp'd in a self-conscious disquisition, Keats reads like an Apocalypse.

IV.

HYPERION

KEATS was twenty-two years old when he finish'd *Hyperion* in November 1817. It represents his youthful effort towards a reconstruction of English poetry on Elizabethan lines, in sympathy with the romantic and natural schools of his time, and in reaction against the poetry of the last century. A year pass'd before he began *Hyperion*, his other long poem, and in that time he fell under the influence of Milton, recognising in *Paradise Lost* the model of that workmanship, the neglect of which had spoil'd his first attempt. *Hyperion* was to be an epic in Milton's manner, narrating the overthrow of the old elemental Greek gods by the new Olympian hierarchy. The difficulty that the events are supramundane is met by reliance on ancient sculpture for the types of the gods, with some hints from Milton's *Pandemonium*, and by placing the scene on earth, where his romantic love of Nature could have full play. *Hyperion* has a palace in the sky, which is luxuriantly describ'd, and he is pictured as resting awhile on the clouds, where he is address'd by *Cœlus* from space; but he is

quickly bravht down to earth, whare a'lso the other gods are wanderin^g.

The openin^g promises well; we are conscious at once of a new musical blank verse, a music both sweet and strong, al^live with imagination and tenderness. Thare and thru' out the poem are passages in which Keats, without losin^g his own individuality, is as good as Milton, whare Milton is as good as Virgil;¹ and such passages rank with the best things that Keats ever did; but in other places he seems a little overshadow' d b^y Milton, wh^{ile} definit passages of the Paradise Lost are reca'll' d, and in some places the imitation seems frigid. Milton's grammar and prosody are apparently eim' d at, but they are not strictly kept, nor is the poem meintein' d at the Miltonic elevation. Here and thare, too, a fanciful or weak expression betrays the author of Endymion. When, in April 1819, Keats had written little more than the first two books, he broke it off; and tho' it was not fⁱnally discarded till fⁱve months afterwards, he never continued it. In his letters he attributes his dissatisfaction to the st^{yl}e; but one cannot read to the end without a conviction that the real hindrance l^y deeper; for a'ltho' we may say that this torso of Keats' is the only poem since Milton which has seriously challenged the epic

¹And see agein p. 169.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

place, it is to the style mainly that this is due; the subject lacks the solid basis of outward event, by which epic maintains its interest: like *Endymion*, it is all imagination; or, if we should accept Keats' personifications as sufficiently real for his purpose, even then the poem fails in conduct. The first two books describe the conditions of the older gods, and are impassioned with defeat, dismay, and collapse; the third introduces the new hierarchy, and we expect to find them radiant, confident, and irresistible; but there is no change in the colour of the poem; of the two deities introduced, Apollo is weeping and raving, and Mnemosyne, who has deserted the old dynasty for her hope in the new, 'wails morn and eventide'. Continuation in this vein was impossible, at least to an artist like Keats. Whatever mental qualities go to make a born artist, none is more essential than an unconscious enthrallment to his creative conception. When any true and sane artist has strayed into a fault that falsifies his conception, then his inspiration comes to a stand. Could he go on, as if all were well, it would be because he was lacking in the essential faculty which makes artistic work good.

The failure here is really the same in kind as the fault of *Endymion*: there is little but imagination, and a one-sidedness or incompleteness of that; a languor which lin-

gers in the main design, tho' the influence of Milton is generally uplifting the language. That Keats was conscious that some of his earlier weaknesses were still visible will appear when we come to consider the Revision of Hyperion; but it would seem that he never rightly discern'd the cause of his dissatisfaction and collapse, for his own criticism of the poem was that it was Miltonic and artificial, and he confesses in a letter of Sept. 1819¹ to a revulsion of taste. Paradise Lost, which not a month before had been 'every day a greater wonder' to him, is now 'a corruption of our language, accommodating itself to Greek and Latin inversions and intonations. I have but lately (he writes) stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me.' These last words mean a great deal, and remind one of Milton's ambitious avoidance of Shakespeare in his own later work. But Keats Grammatical in- in condemning grammatical inversion seems going back from version the great advance in style which he had made, and it is worth while to inquire what he meant. It might seem at first that he attributed to inversions the appearance of Miltonism in his poem, and that he could not afford to be imitativ. But he had not abused inversion in Hyperion, nor is it absent from his revision, nor wholly from his other poems; and the truth is that it is of the essence of good

¹Letters, cxvi.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

style. In ordinary speech the words follow a common order prescrib'd b^y use, and if that does not suit the sense, correction is made b^y vocal intonation: but the first thing that a writer must do is to get his words in the order of his ideas, as he wishes them to enter the reader's mind; and when such an arrangement happens not to be the order of common speech, it may be call'd a grammatical inversion. To take the simplest case, the position of the adjectiv with regard to its substantiv: in French it generally follows the substantiv, and this is in most cases its proper place, and for this reason alone descriptions of scenery are generally more pictorial in French prose than in English, the necessarily frequent predicates bein^g in their natural position: in English the common use sets the epithet before the object, and when this is a malposition of ideas, a poet must invert either his grammar or his ideas; and what is true of adjectiv is true also of every word in the sentence. The best simple writers hav the art of makin^g the common grammatical forms obey their ideas, and Keats has usually a r^{ig}ht order of ideas in a simple grammatical form, and a preference for this style over more elaborat constructions is no doubt what he intended to advocate, and this is well enough: but it must be remember'd that he often gets good effect from the proper use of inversion, which is present

where least suspected; and also that he does not refuse to invert the grammatical order for the sake of rhyme or metre, which, tho' it may occasionally be a beauty, is generally a licence or abuse, a resource of bad writers, and almost as much to be condemn'd as those needless or false inversions which are sometimes used by bad writers to give the effect of heighten'd style.

Revision of Hyperion If now, for the convenience of pursuing our subject, we consider the Revision of Hyperion, we must remember that we are passing over Keats' most important work,—for it was between September 1818, when he began Hyperion, and September 1819, when he discarded it, that is, when he was under the Miltonic influence, that almost all his best work was done,—and we shall now be dealing with what was really a transitional period, tho' its development was arrested, as under the torture of passion, disappointment and mortal disease his bright hopes of poetic attainment faded from him, and his voice was silenced for ever.

He had been disappointed, too, in a resolution which he had made to support himself and those whom his generosity invited to look to his talents for assistance, by doing some hackwork independent of his poetry; and he had return'd dispirited to Hampstead (October 1819), the home of his unfortunate passion, and there, hiding from his friends

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

his restlessness and gloom, had betaken himself again to composition. By some paradoxical devilry, moreover, he devoted the best hours of the day to supplying the market with a comic poem in the Byronic vein, *The Cap and Bells*, and work'd in the evenings only, when fatigued and distracted, at the *Revision of Hyperion*, which might be in itself enough to account for any inferiority in the execution. This fragment is very interesting; first, it shows a new departure in style,—and Keats now deliberately deserts his old manner of relying chiefly on the objective presentation of his ideas by pictures of sensuous imagery and beauty (as describ'd on p. 103, etc.); and, as if he were conscious of his want of success in definition, he now introduces a character who discusses with the main person the meaning of what is pictur'd;—secondly, it shows a deliberate resumption of his old allegorising vein, which we found in *Endymion* and the early poems; and thirdly, it is the most mature attempt that he ever made to express some of his own convictions concerning human life. It is in this third aspect that the chief interest lies, and it is strange that its matter should not have prevented the *Revision* from passing for a first draft, with such critics as might overlook the evidence of the form. The style, being evidently less master'd style than in the longer poem, might at first sight deceive; but it

KEATS

should not have deceived, for, in spite of the inefficient execution, it is in some respects an advance; it aims at a grater severity and has a more thoughtful power than any of Keats' other work. But the evidence of the alterations in the passages common to the two versions is glaring. For instance, Invocation it was an old habit of his to make frequent use of invocation, as almost any page of *Endymion* will show: now in the Revision of *Hyperion* there is not a single vocative *O* admitted; and if we examine a passage which contained such *O*'s in the original, and which is kept in the Revision, we shall see how their exclusion accounts for the alterations: for example, *Hyp. i. 50*:—

Would come in these like accents; *O* how frail
To that large utterance of the early gods!
Saturn, look up! though wherefore, poor old king?
I have no comfort for thee, no not one:
I cannot say, '*O* wherefore sleepest thou?'
For heaven is parted from thee, and the earth
Knows thee not, thus afflicted, for a god.

The *O*'s being proscribed, the first line is altered in Revision, 328, to

Would come in this like accenting: how frail!
and the fifth line to
Wherefore thus sleepest thou?

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

And this new thus drives out the original thus from line 7, which now becomes so afflicted. He then sees the two wherefores and alters the third line to and for what, poor lost king; the change of lost for old being made to avoid the hackney'd poor old.

And besides this conscious correction of old faults, it is (Dante) now for the first time that the influence of Dante appears, and that not merely in the gravity of the vision in this poem, which is unlike any other of his embodiments, and in the sort of connection conceived between his vision of doom and his own experience and poetic meaning, all which he might have come at thru' a translation, but in echos of the Italian balance in passages where the sense is like Dante's, as in this—

High prophetess, said I, purge off,

Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film.

And also where there is only the indefinable and individual touch to point to, as in—

When in mid-day the sickening east-wind

Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain

Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,

where the last line shows that Keats has now added to his style a mastery of Dante's especial grace: and such passages as this, or again when he calls written words

The shadows of melodious utterance,

which is also Dantesque in thought, should, I think, have forbidden the later critics, who knew from external evidence when the Revision was written, from judging that the new style came from decay of poetic power. In these quotations there is certainly no falling off in the magic of his pen, while faults so foreign to him as the wrongness, lowness and awkwardness in the diction of these lines—

*Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shared,
Such things as thou art are admitted oft*

*Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,
show want of mastery in his new, not failure in his old manner, and are, in my opinion, amply accounted for by the fatigue and distraction of those unhappy evenings.*

To conclude this question of style, it may be added, that tho' the effect of an imitation of Milton is fairly got rid of from the Revision, and whole passages are excluded because they were too Miltonic, yet inversions and classicisms are used, and in the line—

*Saturn, sleep on; O thoughtless, why did I,
a Latinism is actually introduced to supplant a mannerism of his own; for O thoughtless is changed to me thoughtless.*

Allegory *To pass now to the meaning of the poem, we will begin with what is certain, and so lead up to the more doubtful*

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

matters. First, it is certain that the poem was intended as an allegory; it is named A Vision, but of Knowledge now, not of Love, and it begins in a figurative garden, as the Divina Commedia in a wood, and there is a supernatural guide, who is to explain things unseen by what is seen. It is also clear that the first version of Hyperion was to be used to supply the vision, and from this it follows that the old Hyperion had also an inner meaning, for it is impossible that Keats would have forced into an allegory a poem which he had conceived and written without such intention. But the original poem being unfinished, did not clearly show this; there are, however, indications of it, and one passage, the speech of Oceanus in Bk. ii, fairly supplies the argument, which is that there is a self-destructive progress in Nature towards good, and that beauty, and not force, is the law of this flux or change. It seems also probable that Keats intended to make Hyperion and Mnemosyne instruct Apollo, and thus to show Light and Song passing into union and perfection out of elemental chaos and crudeness. However this may be, Oceanus bids Saturn take comfort in his dethronement, 'for,' he says,

*To bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstance, all calm
That is the top of sovereignty.*

Of Revision And it is further clear in the Revision that this top of sovereignty is the reward of the poet for conduct in certain circumstances of real life, and that the whole of the introduction (lines 19-266) is an objective picture of those circumstances. Here the allegory is complete, and it is here that it should be intelligible.

And this will serve to guide us at once to separate the Revision into two parts, the first down to line 266, which is the new allegory, and the second from line 267 onward, which is an adaptation of the original poem. This latter part we may neglect; it is only a mimicry of his earlier fine work; but the first part is original, and tho' it opens badly, and has some poor places, it is, from line 19 onwards, generally worthy to be reckon'd with Keats' best work.

Altho' one cannot be wrong in assuming that this allegory is a description of Keats' own life, and of his latest convictions, and one would think that his letters and poems should supply the key with some certainty, yet I would not venture very far, and would offer what I say as suggestion only.

As I read it, the visionaries are those who neglect conduct for the pursuit of any ideal. The garden and feast represent the beauties of Nature, and the drink is poetry, which is made from the fruits of the feast. The intoxication

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

which follow'd the draft represents that complete and excited absorption by poetry which Keats describ'd himself as suffering when he was writing Endymion, and the swoon would be that state of selfish isolation into which he fell in his Miltonic period. His awaking in the temple is his recovery from this to a sympathy with the miseries of the world; and the temple itself is the temple of Knowledge, which it is death for a visionary to enter if he have not that sympathy. The steps to the altar are the struggle of such a mind to reach truth: and truth itself is reveal'd by knowledge. The leaves burning on the altar are years of the poet's life, or his youthful faculties.

Whether or no any or all of these points are rightly interpreted, it is sure that the general meaning is, that tho' Keats conceived of the true poet as a prophet and seer, yet he now valued the life of action and conduct above that of meditation and poetry, and condemns as selfish the merely artistic life which he had been leading; and he is now preaching that actual contact and sympathy with human misery and sorrow are the only school for real insight, which is the reward of true human conduct, and not to be arriv'd at by any other path. In this way only can the poet hope to create anything of value and become himself immortal.

Moneta, the new name for Mnemosyne, must be con-

nected with moneo, and Memory is the same as Knowledge, and she can admonish or teach a knowledge of 'the mysteries of earth'. And this knowledge is what is requir'd to make a poet of a visionary. She is thus foster-mother of Apollo as well as mother of the Muses. She has a harp; and when Apollo says, 'For me dark, dark, and painful vile oblivion seals my eyes', this oblivion must be ignorance regarded as the opposit of that knowledge which is memory. Compare Hyperion, iii, where Apollo 'becomes immortal' by reading in Mnemosyne's lies, just as the poet is to do in the Revision. Thus the temple must be the temple of Knowledge=Memory;¹ and it is fit that Mnemosyne, the Memory of all things, should be primeval, and sister to the oldest god.

The conception of her temple, all that is spar'd from the thunder of the war, is extremely fine in its allegorical manner, with its doors barr'd to the sunrise, and the western past clos'd by a mighty mythical imag of a dead god, and an altar, beside which the goddess of the memory of all change stands veil'd in the smoke of the sacrifice of the poet's life. The marble palace in End. ii. 256-270, corresponds somewhat closely with this temple, tho' the mean-

¹Cf. Letter xxxvii, 'Memory should not be called Knowledge.' February 1818.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

ing is now changed, and it should be compar'd; but in taking this allegory to interpret Keats' mind, it must be remember'd first, that a'll the different states thru' which he may represent himself as havin^g pass'd, were only consecutiv in the sense that he may hav been at one t^{ime} more dominated b^y one view of things, at another t^{ime} b^y another; and tho' in the changin^g strength of his convictions there may hav been a real growth, yet the different feelings were most of them known to him a'lmost from the first, as his letters show: and secondly, that what he condemn'd as his selfish period was the period in which he most benefited mankind; and he sav at the t^{ime} the truth of the paradox, and was tortured b^y the 'solitariness', which proved his sympathy to be alive; and that very torture may hav been his misery at the foot of the a'lta-r-steirs, on which, when he once stepp'd, they fill'd his freezin^g body with natural heat. There is a gr^{at} nobility in a'll this, and considerin^g what v^{ile} treatment he had met with, it is very beautiful that there is not only no word of resentment, but no place for compleint: he takes a'll the blame on his own unwor-thiness. But it is a'lso very sad: hav chang'd now is his feith in the meanin^g of natural beauty to men: his old i^{de}al mistress, Cynthia, the 'lover of the upcast eye', is liken'd with the i^{es} of the goddess of memory, of which he says—

KEATS

*They saw me not,
But in blank splendour beam'd, like the mild moon,
Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
What eyes are upward cast.*

V.

THE TALES

THERE are three finish'd tales or short narrativ poems Isabella by Keats, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Lamia. They are all famous for their beauty, and the first two, which are in stanza, may be said to hav become almost popular. Isabella has, in fact, caus'd the story of the pot of basil to be widely known in England, as much perhaps from the pictures of artists who took their subject from Keats as from the poem itself. The story is unpleasant, and is the worst executed of the three; but the poet has overcome the gruesomeness with skill—he parenthetically interrupts his narration to confess the difficulty,—yet he seldom stays for many lines together above his weaker vein: the appearance of Lorenzo's ghost to Isabella, from stanza xxxxi onwards, being the best sustain'd passag. The poem has many examples of Keats' originality of imagination and felicity of phrase, but is tainted thru'out by a characteristic ægritude of passion, which makes the best occasion

to speak of the curiously close similarity which exists between him and the school of painting which had Rossetti for its head. The lovers who 'could not in the self-same mansion dwell without some malady', the 'sick longing' of Isabella, the 'passion both meek and wild', the 'little sweet among much bitterness', the consciousness of something too horrible to speak of behind the scene, and all the passionate feintness of the personages of the romance,—in whom, as in a faded tapestry, the brilliance of the reiment has outlasted the flesh-colour,—have a likeness to the creations of this school so remarkable, that Keats may be safely credited with a chief share of parentage. Isabella was written in February–April 1818, when Endymion was in the press.

The Eve of St. Agnes The Eve of St. Agnes, written in January 1819, and revised in September, that is, in the Hyperion period, is much more powerful. It is well done throughout, and except for some expressions, criticism could only quarrel with the machinery of the story. This opens with four stanzas about an 'ancient bedesman', who has personally nothing whatever to do with the tale; he provides contrast to the revelry, which he introduces by hearing it, and he also makes opportunity for describing his haunt in the chapel of the heroine's castle: but the chapel is never used again. The feast, too,

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

which Porphyro sets out in Madeline's chamber is robb'd of its motive and serves no purpose but to enrich the description. Both these strands should have been woven in; but they are selected in keeping with the story, and make some of the most successful colouring. The Eve of St. Agnes is not only a passionate tale, but it is very rich in the kind of beauty characteristic of Keats, and contains high poetry both of diction and feeling: the majority of poetic readers would not wish it different from what it is.

Lamia, which was written between July and September 1819, that is, in the interval between the discontinuing and the rejection of Hyperion, is in rhym'd couplets. These differ from those of Endymion in showing an approach to Dryden's versification,¹ and in so far a return from the extreme reaction against Pope with which Keats began. There will always be difference of opinion as to what the excellence of this metre is, but the source of the uncertainty in which Keats found himself is easy to explain. The metre in Chaucer's hands came to be perfectly successful, and chiefly because it was light; and the lightness was due to the presence in his language of terminal vowels and inflexions

¹So the critics say; and Charles Brown told Lord Houghton that Keats purposely studied Dryden's verse: I have not myself a sufficiently intimate acquaintance with it to enable me to judge.

which hav since become mute or entirely disappear'd. For instance, Chaucer wrote—

As thick as motēs in the sonnē beam.

Milton's ten syllables are

As the gay motes that people the sunbeams.

All the buoyancy is gon; and this exemplifies the change which necessarily came over the rhym'd heroic verse. It became heavier and less adapted for narration, and at last was cast mechanically in polish'd couplets, which pass'd in a dull generation for a triumph of classic grace, and were prescrib'd by the Universities as the only form in which they would recognise English poetry. Later poets hav used different devīces for līhtenin the metre, so as to make it agein do Chaucer's work, but the general result is that their līhtly constructed verse is slovenly. Endymion was very successful in the quality of līhtness, but it met with no favour, and the līhtness was gein'd at the cost of other qualities which Keats could now regard without prejudice. In Endymion the couplet and līne units are reduced to a minimum of value, and with these the rhyme value sinks, so that the unrhy'm'd līnes in the poem are scarcely noticed: on the other hand, the verses are frequently tagg'd by evidently foisted rhīmes. But in readin the first dozen līnes of Lamia, the problem seems solved; æll is

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

both light and sure, and there are neither tags nor self-conscious couplets: nothing could be better, and a great deal of the poem is as good as this. The device of separating the couplets by a pause in the sense after the first rhyme is retained from Endymion, and rhyme-triplets and twelve-syllable lines are introduced. But the poem is not altogether well written, the whole passage, i. 300-350, where the subject does not suit him, is plainly below the mark, and here the tags reappear, and they are much more self-evident and offensive in this kind of verse than in Endymion, where they were an avowed means of construction, and where their frequency became familiar and had the advantage of giving great force to any unbroken couplets that were introduced. As for the triplets and twelve-syllable lines, these are no doubt used sometimes with skill, but among regular 'heroics' they are a device of the most transparent artificiality, and by their carefully irregular intrusion they openly expose the monotony which they would awkwardly obviate. From which it would seem that they would find a better home in the less regular verse.

The problem how to match Chaucer's narrative in modern English is much more nearly solved in the unfinished Tale of the Eve of St. Mark, written in eight-syllable couplets with the same sort of latitude which Coleridge advocated

in *Christabel*. The fragment is too short to be a complete experiment, but, so far as it goes, the light verse carries the description of the cathedral town on a shivery Sunday evening in spring with an easy geniality combining beauty and homeliness, and suits just as well the indoors picture, with its combination of mystery and real life; and his mastery of all this, independently of his playful affectation of the delicacies of middle English (copied apparently from Chaucer) recall Chaucer's charm, and seem to show that he had here hit on a narrative form which he might have successfully perfected.

As for the poetry of *Lamia*,¹ it does not all go on as well as it begins, and sometimes fails too in its most highly-wrought passages. The description of the serpent is overdone to vagueness, and her transformation has the same fault. Words like *rosy* and *phosphor* assert themselves; others are dress'd at the call of the rhyme; while very common expressions occasionally produce a bathos, i. 201, 330, 335; ii. 12, 15, 89, 128. Yet Keats was trying to correct his old faults; for instance, in revising, he appears to have written silently in ii. 134 for *silverly*: and *Lamia* is constructively the most perfect of his three narratives. I remark that 'the taller grasses and full flowering weed' of i. 44 do not

¹For a criticism of the passion, see p. 162.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

agree with the daffodils of line 184: and I consider it a blot that Lycius should die at the end; because he is kill'd by Apollonius, who, if he could not rescue him, should have let him alone. Philosophy or Reason is made unamiable: but I am afraid that Keats may have intended this; and he makes Apollonius laugh, which is almost diabolic. The general meaning is, no doubt, the antagonism of reason and pleasure, or of science and imagination (ii. 229 seq.), or both; and that reason should take delight in destroying pleasure is only one of the ugly doctrines that lurk beneath the text if it be read as a parable. But it is very uncertain how much Keats intended. He may have had in his mind the selfishness of the artist absorb'd in his ideals, and his catastrophe in the justifiable indifference of the world to the creations of mere art. On August 23, 1819, he wrote thus: 'A solitary life engenders pride and egotism, but this pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than anything else could,—so I will indulge it.' And in less than a month he had wholly banish'd from himself as unworthy this strong conviction of his duty.

VI.

THE ODES

HAD Keats left us only his Odes, his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is, for they have stood apart in literature, at least the six most famous of them; and these were all written in his best period, when he was under the Miltonic influence—that is, between the early spring of 1819, while he was still engag'd on *Hyperion*, and the autumn, when he discarded it. These are the six: 1. *Psyche*; 2. *Melancholy*; 3. *Nightingale*; 4. *Greek Urn*; 5. *Indolence*; 6. *Autumn*.

To these should be added 7, the fragment of the *May Ode*, May 1, 1818, and 8, the *Ode to Pan*, from *Endymion*, bk. i, and 9, the *Bacchic Ode to Sorrow* in *Endymion*, bk. iv. But the two hymns to *Neptune* and *Diana* in *Endymion* are only worth enumeration, and the two early odes to *Apollo* and the *Ode to a Lock of Milton's Hair* are, as are the two later Odes to *Fanny*, chiefly or entirely of personal interest.

Of the seven odes first enumerated, if we rank them merely according to perfection of workmanship, the one that

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

was last written, that is, the Ode to Autumn, will claim the highest place; and unless it be objected as a slight blemish that the words 'Think not of them' in the 2nd line of the 3rd stanza are somewhat awkwardly address'd to a personification of Autumn, I do not know that any sort of fault can be found in it. But this ode does not in any part of it reach the marvellous heights attain'd by several of the others in their best places, and even if judg'd as a whole it is left far behind by the splendour of the Nightingale, in which the mood is more intense, and the poetry vides in richness and variety with its subject.

The song of the nightingale is, to the hearer, full of assertion, promise, and cheerful expectancy, and of pleading and tender passionat overflowing in long drawn-out notes, interspersed with plenty of playfulness and conscious exhibitions of musical skill. Whatever pain or sorrow may be express'd by it, it is idealis'd—that is, it is not the sorrow of a sufferer, but the perfect expression of sorrow by an artist, who must have felt, but is not feeling; and the ecstasy of the nightingale is stronger than its sorrow, altho' different hearers may be differently affected according to their mood. Keats in a sad mood seized on the happy interpretation and promise of it, and gives it in this line—

Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

But the intense feeling in his description of human sorrow (stanza 3) is weaken'd by the direct platitude that the bird has never known it; and in the penultimate stanza the thought is fanciful or superficial,—man being as immortal as the bird in every sense but that of sameness, which is assumed and does not satisfy. The introduction, too, of the last stanza is artificial, while his choosing self for a rhyme-word,¹ turns out disastrously; and he loses hold of his main idea in the words 'plaintive anthem', which, in expressing the dying away of the sound, changes its character. No praise, however, could be too high for those last six lines; and if grammar and sense are a little obscure in the first ten, I could not name any English poem of the same length which contains so much beauty as this ode.

Next to this I should rank *Melancholy*. The perception in this ode is profound, and no doubt experienced. The paradox that melancholy is most deeply felt by the organisation most capable of joy is clinch'd at the end by the observation of the reaction which satiety provokes in such temperaments, so that it is also in the moment of extremest joy that it suddenly fades—

¹The elf belongs to W. Brown of Tavistock, whom I suspect to have been the remote cause of the hitch in the first stanza—

Philomel, I do not envy thy sweet carolling.

Brit. Past., i. 3, 164.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Turning to poison while the bee mouth sips:

Ay, in the very temple of Delight

Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine.

In spite of the great beauty of this ode, especially of the last stanza, it does not hit so hard as one would expect. I do not know whether this is due to a false note¹ towards the end of the second stanza, or to a disagreement between the second and third stanzas. In the second stanza the melancholy is, as Lord Houghton said, a 'luxurious tenderness', while in the third it is strong, painful, and incurable.

The line—

That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
means all the flowers only that are sacred to sorrow. See End. iv. 170.

Next in order might come Psyche, for the sake of the last section (l. 50 to end), tho' this is open to the objection that the imagery is work'd up to outface the idea—which is characteristic of Keats' manner. Yet the extreme beauty quenches every dissatisfaction. The beginning of this ode is not so good, and the middle part is midway in excellence.

Next, and disputing place with the last, comes the Grecian Urn. The thought as enounced in the first stanza is the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its

¹For its explanation, see p. 163.

unchangin^g expression of perfection; and this is true and beautiful; but its amplification in the poem is unprogressiv^e, monotonous, and scatter'd, the attention bein^g call'd to fresh details without result (see espec. ll. 21-24, anticipated in 15, 16), which giv^es an effect of poverty in spite of the beauty. The last stanza enters stumblin^g on a pun, but its concludin^g lines are very fine, and make a sort of recovery with their forcible directness.

The last of the six, Indolence, is the objectiv picturin^g of a transient mood, and may be the description of an actual half-wakin^g vision. If the details, such as the appearin^g of the figures four times, hav^e no definit meanin^g, and I cannot fix eny, they are too arbitrary. Parts of stanzas 2 and 3 and all the 5th are of the best work; but the whole ode scarcely earns its title; and its main interest, that is, its fervour and feelin^g, betrays the poet into an undignifi'd utterance in line 4 of the last verse.

The fragment of the May Ode is immortal on account of the famous passag of inimitable beauty descriptiv of the Greek poets—

Leaving great verse unto a little clan, etc.

With these seven the two chief odes in Endymion are worthy to rank. The ode to Pan in Book I is good enough in desin^g. Pan is first invok'd as ruler in dark and moist woods;

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

secondly, as the god to whom all natural products are sacred with contrast of sunny places; thirdly, as king of fauns and satyrs; fourthly, for six lines as farm-god. But this last idea has been anticipated by interpolation in the previous section. Then the last part of the ode connects Pan with the secrets and power of Nature. The expression But no more, however interpreted, is unfortunate at the end of the ode. The diction throughout is rich and the imagery chosen well for the work that it has to do in the various aspects of the god's energy, the different objects being seized and shown in happy phrases full of knowledge and feeling; and though it might perhaps have been better if the second section had immediately preceded the last, rather than that the mysteries should follow close on the farm, there is no great fault to find. But yet the ode does not at first reading make an impression corresponding to these merits, nor has it won, like the others, a high reputation; and this may be due partly to the vagueness of the personification, caused by the variety of attributes and objects, and partly to the versification, which, though generally easy and fluent, pauses, especially in the second division, too frequently in the mid-line, in the manner of tagging, and produces thereby something of the effect of a catalog, very foreign to the repose and finish which we look for in a set ode.

KEATS

Lastly, as to the Ode to Sorrow in the 4th book of *Endymion*, I regard this as one of the gratest of Keats' achievements, and agree with a'll that Mr. Sidney Colvin has said in its preise in his *Life of Keats*. It unfortunately halts in the openin, and the 1st and 4th stanzas especially are unequal to the rest, as is agein the 3rd from the end, 'Young stranger', which for its matter would with more propriety hav been cast into the previous section; and these impoverish the effect, and contein expressions which might put some readers off. If they would begin at the 5th stanza and omit the 3rd from the end, they would find little that is not admirable. And, as it stands, the ode is, I think, the better for these omissions. The pictorial description of the Bacchic procession is unmatch'd for life, wide motion, and romantic dreamy Orientalism, while the concluding stanzas, returning to the first movement, are as lovely as eny Elizabethan lyric, and in the same manner. The bold contrast and passion of the ode, in spite of its weaker openin, and the few expressions which remind one that it is an early work, giv it a unique place amon the richest creations of the English Muse.

VII.

SONNETS

THERE are nearly sixty sonnets in the latest editions of Keats' poems, but the most of them are sonnets only in external form. The metrical laws and liberties of sonnet-writing have been much inflicted on readers, and sonnets are usually classifi'd by their differences in these minor particulars. But a more useful classification would be by their contents and form of thought. The typical sonnet is a reflective poem on love, or at least in some mood of love or desire, or absorbing passion or emotion; and such a definition includes almost everything which cannot be readily referr'd to some quite different species of poetry, as a few considerations may illustrate.

The Greek epigram, for instance, was originally, as the name implies, an inscription: its business was to record some event or mark some place, and its excellence to raise an emotion in the reader's mind. Its qualities, terseness with pathos, soon establish'd a form which poets used for other purposes, until in the hands of city wits the name wholly changed its signification, and often now the record is a piece

KEATS

of scandal, and the emotion such as may be express'd bꝯ a well-bred jeer; a sad faꝯll from Simonides. The sonnet form has been as loosely and variously used as the epigram, and the many varieties of the two hav more than one point of contact; but it is plain that an epigram proper cannot become a sonnet bꝯ mere expansion to fourteen lines;—this happens to exceed epigrammatic length, but is possible in dedications and temple inscriptions,—and such a hybrid may at least be separated off as an epigrammatic sonnet.

Again, Horace elaborated a form of ode which it is easier to recognise than in few words describe; and a number of Milton's sonnets may be referr'd to this ode form. If we compare, for example, his Cyriack, whose grandsire, with Martiis cœlebs or Æli vetusto, there can be no doubt that Milton was here deliberately using the sonnet form to do the work of Horace's tight stanzas; and not the whole of Shakespeare's or Petrarch's sonnets set alongside will show enough kinship with these sonnets of Milton to draw them away from their affinity with Horace. Such sonnets, too, as his addresses to Vane, Fairfax, and Cromwell are properly odes, and should be call'd odes, or at least odic sonnets.

Again, there is a class of poetry call'd 'occasional verse', and such a poem as may be written on any trivial event or fancy cannot become a sonnet because it goes begging for a

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

dress, and conscious not only of nakedness but of leanness, steals a well-cut garment for disguise.

These examples may suffice, if it be noted first, that nothing forbids a true sonnet from having an epigrammatic, or odic, or occasional motif—and this last is very common; and secondly, that all these forms and others are found mix'd in the sonnet with its true subject-matter in all proportions.

Now not so many as half of Keats' sonnets can be any stretch of interpretation be call'd sonnets proper, if we consider their substance rather than their verse form. The greater number of them are occasional, reflectiv, or odic addresses or dedications, or poems on places and books. And these hybrids come thickest among the earlier poems, while the true sonnets predominate towards the end. Again, almost all the early sonnets are Italian in rhyme system, and all the later are Shakespearian; and if we pick out from them the twelve best poems, these will all be found to be true sonnets and eight of them on the Shakespearian model. Twelve is all that very high praise can be given to, and that number already encroches on the second best; and if a next twelve be chosen, this would be made up almost equally of true sonnets and hybrids. From which it seems that these hybrid poems of Keats, tho most of them

KEATS

contain lines which make us glad to possess and preserve them, are among his immature performances; and also that as he improved in composition he relinquish'd his foreign subject-matter, and the Italian rhyme system, and did his best work in the English manner.

There are ten very fine sonnets; they are—

'Much have I travelled.'

'When I have fears.'

'Come hither all sweet maidens.'

'Four seasons.'

'Bright star.'

'O soft embalmer.'

'I cry your mercy.'

'As Hermes once.'

'The day is gone.'

'Time's sea.'

And with these, some might class for its easy and pleasant mastery—

'To one who hath been long in city pent.'

And the sonnet 'Why did I laugh to-night?' has been selected and admir'd by some critics: it seems to me to be turgid and capricious, and hence unsuccessful. But all the first ten are extremely fine—the first eight being nearly faultless—and must stand among the best in the language.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

And if we pass from them to the next in merit, there is a great fall. Such a list would contain Spenser a jealous honourer; Many the wonders; Nymph of the downward smile; How many bards; Small busy flames; Keen fitful gusts; My spirit is too weak; Glory and loveliness, and The town the churchyard; and there is not one of these which does not plainly fail, and that sometimes badly, in some part, tho' all have their points of excellence.¹

Not to speak of the magnificence of the ten best sonnets (the 8th line of the first is below the mark; the final couplet of No. 2 is weak; the 4th line of No. 9 requires much allowance, and see p. 92), Keats' sonnets are generally distinguish'd by a total absence of the self-consciousness which is the common bane of sonnets, and has got them a bad name among honest folk; so that many lovers of poetry put Keats' sonnets next to Shakespeare's. They are free from effort and puzzle-headedness and pedantry, and when they do fail, they do not fail stiffly but negligently, and most of them are pleasant poems and grateful to the reader.

¹Matthew Arnold selected eight sonnets; five are among the eight which I have set first: the other three are—After dark vapours; Great spirits now; The poetry of the earth.

VIII.

EPISTLES

THERE are four Epistles written in ten-syllable couplets:—

1. To Geo. Felton Mathew (Nov. 1815).
2. To my brother George (Aug. 1816).
3. To Ch. Cowden Clarke (Sept. 1816).
4. To Reynolds (March 1818).

And with them may be group'd the two poems criticised p. 94, etc., that is, the short *Endymion* and *Sleep and Poetry*.

Tho' there are good things in these Epistles, their execution is in every respect very poor, and they are in so far more like letters written in rhyme than poems in the form of letters, and they may all be taken with the apology which Keats sent with the fourth, to 'excuse the unconnected subject and careless verse'. The Epistle to Cowden Clarke is altogether far the worst, and tho' it has a rational argument, it is not worth defending from any condemnation for want of artistic form; but it is in my opinion wrong to include the other early epistles and poems in this

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

judgment. In my previous analysis of two of these, I have pointed out their really solid construction, and the 1st, 2nd and 4th of the Epistles are, I should say, quite as well built. Their 'argument' is perfectly clear, and if the form of it escapes the reader's attention, that is due to the lightness of the imaginativ touch and flight, which is a welcome escape from the conscious pedantries of form, and, so long as the sense is clear, a great merit. Indeed, if the expression of these Epistles were at all worthy of their frame-work, they would be models of what such epistles should be. Nos. 1 and 2 must be pass'd over here. No. 4 is of great interest. Its argument (tho' Keats himself calls the poem unconnected) is a very beautiful artistic movement of thought, just short of caprice, returning at the end with great force to the apparent first motive, which is suddenly reveal'd as being much weightier than was at first allow'd to appear. The heads are these:—Automatic capricious imaginations of all kinds, 1-12, very common; they may be beautiful, as a picture by Titian, describ'd, -25; or like Claude's Enchanted Castle, describ'd, -66. The wish that all our imaginings could take such colouring, etc.; question why they cannot, -85. The poet shows himself haunted by a horrid mood.¹ -end.

¹ And see again p. 166.

KEATS

The passag l. 67 onwards is of importance with respect to Keats' method—

○ that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,
Would all their colours from the sunset take:
From something of material sublime, etc.

If this be compar'd with the passag which is contrasted with Wordsworth on p. 102 there will be a mutual illustration of sense.

Keats also here, in a confession of failure, analyses his inability to express his ideas—

Imagination brought
Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,
Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
Cannot refer to any standard law
Of either earth or heaven.

Also in this poem he plainly states that he does not consider his mind matured, nor able to teach, and that he is a prey to the moods of pessimism, but that he will not give way to them. He longs rather for the time when he shall arrive at 'the love of good and ill', and speaks of it as his 'award'.

IX.

LYRICAL POEMS

IF we include among the lyrical poems those written in seven-seven-syllable couplets, we find three popular pieces, *Souls of Poets*, *Bards of Passion*, and *Ever let the Fancy Roam*. In a letter to his brother, January 1819, Keats writes: 'These are specimens of a sort of rondeau which I think I shall become partial to, because you have one idea amplified with greater ease and more delight and freedom than in the sonnet.' The theme is stated in the first four lines, and then, after an amplification without progress, these are used again in the last division to make a close by return, like a rondo in music; and the form seems good, simple and attractive. These three poems have all of them the popular qualities of fluency and grace, and the statement of the subject is provocative of interest; yet, though the first sustains itself in a fine vein for six lines, there is little other merit either of thought or diction in the first two. Mr. M. Arnold chose these and excluded the *Fancy* from his selection, but there can be no doubt that this last is by far the best of the three. It is maintained throughout at a fair

KEATS

level, and the simple descriptions of nature, recavllin
L'Allegro, are often very beautiful; and in the last divi-
sion thare is a sensuous passag done in the fyne Miltonic
manner, whare the eihht-syllable lyne is introduced with
grat effect, descriptivly of Jove's languor.

Of the fyve other poems in this measure thare is none
worthy of preise as a whole.

Lyrics in Thare are left nav only the lyrical poems in stanza,
stanzas and easily first, holdin, a unique place in literature, stands
La belle dame sans merci. This occurs in a long journa-
listic letter from Keats to his brother in America, and is
dated 'Wednesday evening', that is, April 28, 1819. It
seems as if he had compos'd it on that dy, and written it
down hastily from memory, so that he had to correct several
mistaks afterwards; and, from the remarks appended to
it, it looks as if he was at the tyme unaware of its grat
merit. It was not inserted in the Lamia volume, but first
appear'd thru' Leigh Hunt in the Indicator for May 10,
1820, and this version differs from that in Keats' letter in
one or two points; and these may be corrections by Keats,
but the original first lyne, which exists in Keats' own
handwritin, must be kept. 'Wretched wight', the un-
fortunat correction, is of the same kind, and appears to be
of the same date as the corrections of Hyperion: it is cold

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

and poor, and damagin^g to the tragic motiv of the poem, and out of keepin^g with its heroic detail, wheras the original 'knight-at-arms' givs the keynote of romance and of aloofness from real li^fe, and the suggestion of armour is of the gratest value to the general colourin^g. It would be impertinence to preise this poem, which charms alike old and youn^g; and it stands above the reach of criticism. For other reasons it is better not to criticise 'In a drear-nighted December', which, after a very lon^g interval indeed, must be placed next. This poem, which must surely hav been Thos. Hood's model, is a grat favourit, and perhaps deservedly so, both for its beauty and originality, but the latter quality proves expensiv.¹ And after this poem thare is another gap, for if we mention the next best lyrics, we come to such poems as Meg Merrilies, and Where be you going, you Devon maid? which, as Lord Houghton printed it, omittin^g the second stanza, is successful; and I had a dove, which could only hav been written b^y a poet; and Walking in Scotland, of which the obscurity and strangness of the sentiment describ'd make it noteworthy. Mrs. Owen quotes the Faery son^g Shed no tear! as worthy of Keats, but we wonder hav it was that thare are not more better lyrics. Keats, one would

¹ Several amended versions of the last stanza hav latly come to li^ght, 1929.

KEATS

hav thavht, would hav excell'd in them, and we can only suppose that we hav his odes instead.

Success in lyrical verse requiſes a delicatly strict ſubjection of imagination to one purpoſ, and this was not a part of Keats' poetic inſtinct; and tho' when he came to learn it, he wrote as it would ſeem almoſt unconſciouſly one of the beſt lyrics in the world; yet it is not improbable that he would ſtill hav regarded lyrics as a tract whare he might caſt off reſtreint. The fact remeins that, with the exception of La belle dame, he never bravht a'll his genius to 'ſpend its fury in a ſong'.

X.

OTHO AND STEPHEN

OTHO the Great is contemporary with Lamia: it was written July-September 1819, and should therefore be among Keats' best work; but it is not, so that its failure must be specially accounted for: and it may, I think, be entirely laid to inexperience, and to the ugly and ill-shapen Elizabethan models to which Keats apparently look'd in good faith for guidance; and among which, with their stagey fury, unnecessary confusions, rude manners, and occasional magnificences, his play might pass undistinguish'd. Unfortunatly too this play turns on a question of maiden virtue, which he could not handle, and which he did not even choose for himself, for the plot was furnish'd him by a friend, who gave him the scenes across the table to versify or dramatise one by one—a most deadening situation. It is badly contriv'd: the antecedent conditions are very elaborat, and yet are never plainly stated; they have to be discover'd from isolated, ill-manag'd and confused hints in the dialog; so that the attention of an auditor, if it was not entirely put off by this riddle, would only be kept alive

KEATS

by a wish to come to a judgment of his gesses. The riddle, moreover, has no satisfactory solution. Then the scenes themselves are rather lacking in distinct dramatic point, independently of the uncertainty of the motif. But if these faults are not wholly due to Keats, he must yet have the blame of the lack of moral import, and of the imperfect delineation of the characters, whose manners are not good, and who seem to take a conscious interest in the plot. The style has the faults of cold magnificence, occasional flatness and common expressions, with careless grammar, and the use of childish tricks for impromptu effect. In spite of all this, there is a succinctness and force about the whole, which forbid one to conclude that Keats would not have succeeded in drama: and though it is commonly said that he lacked the essential moral grasp, his letters seem to me to refute this, and his determination would have been sufficient assurance of success. In fact, the fragment of Stephen, which he began on his own lines after finishing Otho, already shows an advance. This is written in a style midway between Marlowe and Shakespeare, and recalls the opening of the third part of Henry VI. The imitated magnificence is somewhat restless, but the narrative and purpose of the characters stand out fairly well amid the stir and freedom which was evidently the poet's aim.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

It would be easy to quote from Otho some fine passages, and many fine lines and expressions, but they seem to be buried in a rubbish-heap from which one gladly turns back to the green tangle of Endymion.

DICTION AND RHYTHM

Vocabulary KEATS' vocabulary, to judge by the impression that one gets from reading his poems, is rich, and his use of quite a large number of words that are not commonly found must be reckon'd among the factors of his style. Mr. W. Arnold¹ has made a special examination of these, and his remarks imply an objection to adjectives with the suffix *y*, like *bloomy* and *bowery*; but when these are form'd from substantives they are regular enough. Adjectives thus form'd from other adjectives—like *paly*, which should mean full of *pales* or *pallings*,—are not on the same footing: to any one accusom'd to Chaucer's verse they would sound more like old than new words, and they would be useful in versification, but they are also like *baby-talk*, and generally indefensible; it does not appear, however, that Keats laid himself open to any reproach in this particular. *Paly* had been used by other writers; and even with these words the test is their success, not their regularity. I never heard of anyone objecting to Shakespeare's

I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Indeed, what is in question is very much the same with the

¹Essay publish'd with his edition of Keats' poems.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

words as with the spirits, whether they will come when you do call for them.

Among Keats' inventions spangly does not look promising; but the passage in Isabella—

As when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,

Thinking on rugged hours and fruitless toil,

We put our eyes into a pillow's cleft,

And see the spangly gloom froth up and boil,

amply justifies the word, for which no other could be substituted: and it has been received into the language. So again the 'pipy hemlock' in the Ode to Pan is admirable: on the other hand, 'boundly reverence' defies interpretation; but the general result of Mr. Arnold's examination is that most of the strange words in Keats were taken from earlier writers. Readers of the poems cannot miss noting these: they are less likely to observe the exact nature of the class of epithets which most frequently recur; the chief group might, I think, be called languid, such as quiet, sweet, fair, white, green, old, young, little, and other such words as tender, gentle, easy, fresh, pleasant, most of these suggestive of comfort. Then the melting, fainting, swimming, swooning, and panting words are over-frequent. Words like wild, dark, deep, strange, lone, mysterious, etc., have a great deal to do, but they are not

work'd so hard as b^y Shelley. Keats has a/so a pretty steady recurrence of certein objects; he is as fond of moss and eagles as Shelley was, and echoes, bees, marble, silver, dew, nests and weeds,—and the list m^{ight} be extended,—are too conspicuous. A gr^{at} deal of the general insipidity and tedium of Endymion may be analysed down to this. The over-frequent use which he makes of tiptoe—taken from Shakespeare—is very characteristic of his manner. But he outgrew a/ll this, and if in his early poems he uses these words too frequently, yet he has a/so used them as well as they can be used. Some faults of his pronunciation, which hav been ca/ll'd Cockneyisms, cannot be pass'd so easily. Thus perhaps, used as a monosyllable, is abominable: but this occurs only in the early poems. And he renounces in Lamia his pronunciation of toward, which he had hitherto used as a disyllable accented on the last, and comes round to the contracted pronunciation. This word, and words l^{ike} fire and lyre, which he makes disyllables, often weaken his l^{ines}; for in disyllabic metres which admit elisions and trisyllabic feet, they will not readily, at least to m^y ear, sustain a whole foot of two syllables. Verse which allavs such a l^{ine} as this—

*Ah desperate mortal! I even dared to press (End. i. 661),
halts at the followin—*

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

And then, towards me, like a very maid (i. 634).

Dearest Endymion, my entire love (iii. 1022).

The lyre of his soul Æolian tuned (ii. 866).

But Keats also amended this later, tho' too late to destroy the effect of his example, and used these syllables¹ in Hyperion as Milton would have done—

Didst find a lyre all golden by thy side (iii. 63).

Of the same kind is the exaggerated value which he gives to the semivowel *l*, in the following lines for example—

The dazz-l-ing sunrise; two sisters sweet,

Turn'd syllab-l-ing thus: Ah, Lycius bright.

He also, like Shelley, makes a trisyllable of evening.

There is another peculiarity common to Keats and Shelley, which should be noticed because it introduces an instability into Keats' rhythms. It is found in earlier writers, for instance, in this line from Shakespeare—

Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer,
where the accent of the last foot is not inverted, but the compound torch-bearer, which we pronounce with a stress both on the first and second syllables, carries no stress at all on the second, but perhaps a slight compensating stress

¹Lyre is an unfortunate word to extend unduly. I have seen the following verse as motto for a song-book—

The lyre's voice is lovely everywhere.

or delay on the last. There are a great many words made in this way of a monosyllable and a disyllable, in which we now observe both the colliding accents; and if these words occur in disyllabic rhythms of alternate stress, with their first syllable in the regular stress'd place, then the next foot will to our ears, train'd as they have been by Milton, have its stress inverted. I think that this is not always intended by Keats: here are examples—

A show-monster about the streets of Prague.
That camp-mushroom, dishonour of our house.
Of bean-blossoms in heaven freshly shed.
Or they might watch the quoit-pitchers, intent.
Of love-spangles just off yon cape of trees.
The poor folk of the sea-country I blest.
Then came a conquering earth-thunder and rumbled.
All death-shadows, and glooms that overcast.
Make not your rosary of yew-berries.

And the pronunciation in the following lines is probably caused by the same dislike of colliding accents in a compounded trisyllable—

Look'd up; a conflicting of shame and ruth.
And strives in vain to unsettle and wield.
And thus no doubt—

In a drear-nighted December.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

We now read this line (as we do most of the others) with our changed accent, and we rather like the irregularity thus introduced into the verse. There is, in fact, one line of Shelley which is particularly admir'd for a very beautiful rhythm, which he probably did not intend—

And wild-roses and ivy serpentine,
where Shelley, I should suppose, stress'd wild-roses like
primroses: in the same poem is

There grew pied windflowers and violets.
And he has

Sweet-basil and mignonette.

Bride-maidens, quick-silver, bird-footed, train-bearer, etc., and in the Recollection are pine-forest, and wood-pecker, where the beautiful versification has, at least to my ear, a charm added to it by the extra licence which our pronunciation introduces.

Whether these poets took this accent from the Elizabethans, or whether it really had linger'd on, I do not know: in later poets it seems only an affectation; but it is a real source of uncertainty in Keats' verse, because he not only used the other pronunciation also, but he allowed the rhythmical inversions which that would introduce into the verses where it was apparently not intended.

And for this reason it would not do to decide this ques- Rhythm

tion merely on the assumption that Keats could not have intended the inversion of stress. He begins one sonnet with the line—

How many bards gild the lapses of time,
where the inversion of the third and fourth stresses is very musical and suitable to the exclamatory form of the sentence. Again, in *End. i.*—

Young companies nimbly began dancing.

The inversion of the third and fifth stresses admirably pictures the dancers stepping on the scene: and such rhythms as

Visions of all places; a bowery nook,
shows what a brave view he took of rhythm, and how melodiously his verse carries variety. And he was fond of inversion even of the fifth foot, e.g.—

Guarding his forehead with her round elbow.

Was in his plaited brow; yet his eyelids.

Like vestal primroses, but dark velvet.

Golden, or rainbow-sided, or purplish, etc.

And if these might be regarded as merely a grace snatch'd from the remember'd cadences of old romance, yet he also uses this inversion deliberately with its full proper force, as for the irony of impossibility in

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art,

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

and in the followin^g, whare the stron^g enclitic accent has almost the effect of terror (see p. 120)—

Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not.

In one place at least in *Endymion* an inverted fifth foot is made to rhyme to a line with an extra-metrical syllable at the end of it: an uncomfortable effect common in Wyatt and writers of the time of Henry VIII. And in another place a rhythmical effect is savht by usin^g Chaucer's licence of omittin^g the first syllable of the line; for thare is evidence that Keats intended this (Letter xxxix)—

And the dull twanging bow-string, and the raft
Branch down sweeping from a tall ash top.

As thare is not space in this essay to treat this subject thoro'ly, I hav chosen these few points as bein^g of importance to the reader. I may conclude by sayin^g generally that Keats' rhythm, in spite of its variety, is easy and fluent rather than restless or poverful.

XII.

GENERAL

Imaginativ phrases IN these detach'd criticisms many of the main qualities of Keats' poetry have been incidentally brought out; there is one, as yet unmention'd, which claims the first place in a general description, and that is the very seal of his poetic birthright, the highest gift of all in poetry, that which sets poetry above the other arts; I mean the power of concentrating all the far-reaching resources of language on one point, so that a single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the æsthetic imagination at the moment when it is most expectant and exacting, and at the same time astonishes the intellect with a new aspect of truth. This is only found in the greatest poets, and is rare in them; and it is no doubt for the possession of this power that Keats has been often liken'd to Shakespeare, and very justly, for Shakespeare is of all poets the greatest master of it; the difference between them here is that Keats' intellect does not supply the second factor in the proportion or degree that Shakespeare does; indeed, it is chiefly when he is dealing with material and sensuous subjects that his poems afford illustrations; but these are, as far as they go, not

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

only like Shakespeare, but often as good as Shakespeare when he happens to be confining himself to the same limited field. Examples from Shakespeare are such well-known sayings as these—

My way of life

Is faln into the sear, the yellow leaf.—Macbeth.

Lay not that flattering unction to your soul.—Hamlet.

We are such stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.—Tempest.

Examples from Keats are—

The journey homeward to habitual self.

Solitary thinkings; such as dodge

Conception to the very bourne of heaven.

My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams.

In most of Keats' phrases of this sort there is a quality which makes them unlike Shakespeare; and if we should put into one group all those which are absolutely satisfactory, and then make a second group of those which are not so simply convincing, we should find in these last that the un-Shakespearian quality was more declar'd, and came out as something fanciful, or rather too vagly or venturesomely suggestiv; the whole phrase displaying its poetry rather than its meaning, and being in consequence less apt

KEATS

and masterly. This second group would contain many of the most admir'd lines of Keats, and these are very characteristic of him. Such are—

*Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks,*

and—

How tiptoe Night holds back her dark-grey hood.

The Revision of Hyperion shows that Keats himself was dissatisf'd with his senators; and one can see the reason without condemning the passage or approving its omission. Finally, there would be left a third group of such-like phrases which plainly miss the mark.

Closely all'd to these imaginative phrases, and perhaps more characteristic of Keats and peculiar to him, are the short vivid pictures which may be call'd his masterpieces of word-painting, in which with a few words he contrives completely to finish a picture which is often of vast size. Good examples of this are the sestet of the Leander sonnet; the last four lines of the Chapman's Homer; the passage beginning Golden his hair in Hyperion ii. 371; and, to quote one from Endymion—

*The woes of Troy, towers smothering o'er their blaze,
Stiff-holden shields, far-piercing spears, keen blades,
Struggling, and blood, and shrieks.*

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

For its wealth in such rare strokes of descriptiv imagination Keats' poetry must a'lwys take the very first rank; and it is his imaginativ quality of phrase which sets him more than eny other poet of his tyme in creativ antagonism to the eihteenth-century wrtters; for it was not only forein to their stile, but incomprehensible and repugnant to their pseudo-classic taste, which preferr'd a 'reasonable propriety of thought', such as Hume fawnd to be lackin, in Shakespeare, to the shadowy pavers of imagination, however sublyme.

The limitation that we fawnd of Keats' faculty when compar'd with Shakespeare—which, if it may be ascrib'd wholly to his youth, amply justifies the sentiment of the openin lynes of this essay—leads us on naturally to another of his chief characteristics, and that is his close relationship with common Nature: he is for ever drawin his imagery from common things, which are for the first tyme represented as beautiful: and agein in this we see his opposition to the eihteenth-century wrtters, who meinly contented themselves with conventional commonplaces for their natural imagery; wheras Keats discovers in the most usual objects either beauty or sorces of delight or comfort, or sometymes even of imaginativ horror, which are a'll new; and here his originality seems inexhavstible, and

his wide poetic sympathies the strongest. Nor does he confine himself to matters of which he could have had much experience; he makes Nature the object of his imaginative faculty—Nature apart from man, or related to man as an enchantress to a dreamer. This is, I suppose, what he means when, comparing himself with Byron, he says, 'There is this great difference between us: he describes what he sees, —I describe what I imagine. Mine is the hardest task: now see the immense difference.'¹ Here he shows a vast wealth which makes his poems a mine of pleasure. *Endymion* is crowded to excess with a variety of these images, and as they came up in his mind in an endless stream to illustrate his ideas, the ideas sometimes fare rather badly; for though they were no doubt generally held firm in his own mind, they are yet drawn'd by the images of their objective presentation; until these themselves at last lose even their own virtue, and fatigue the reader, who feels like a sightseer in a gallery overcrowded with pictures, which by degrees he ceases to regard with attention.

Passion And in this devotion to natural beauty lies, I believe, one true reason of Keats' failure in the delineation of human passion. The only passion delineated by Keats is the imaginative love of Nature, and human love is regarded by him

¹Letters, cxvi, p. 301.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

as a part of this, and his lover is happy merely because admitted into communion with new forms of natural beauty. This, which appear'd in theory in the explanation of the allegory of Endymion (p. 85), is practically expos'd in the 2nd stanza of the Ode to Melancholy, where, among the objects on which a sensitive mind is recommended to indulge its melancholy fit, the anger of his mistress is enumerated with roses, peonies, and rainbows, as a beautiful phenomenon, plainly without respect to its cause, meaning, or effect. And so in Lamia—

He took delight

Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new,
and

Fine was the mitigated fury.

How different is the parallel passage of Shakespeare, which at once occurs to one—

O, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful

In the contempt and anger of his lip!

This is not artistic admiration, but a lover's entire devotion.

In the criticism of Endymion we found a want of taste in Keats' idea of woman; we have now to add a charge of lack of true insight into human passion. If this was wholly due to the absence of awakening experience, it is at least unfortunate that in Lamia, in which from its date we might

hav expected somethin, mature, he should hav chosen so low a tpe. Tho' perhaps suggested b^y the original of his story, it was not necessary to it; and even if he preferr'd to hav his snake-woman bad, thare was every reason wh^y Lycius' passion should hav been of a h^{igher} tpe. Hav unworthy it is is shown in the description of their meetin, and in the followin, sentiment—

But too short was their bliss

To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft voice hiss.

This love is an association for mutual pleasure, the end of which is sat^{isfaction}ety and revulsion, and it is, I repeat, at least unfortunat that Keats, after he had known love, should, in his first attempt to delineate it, hav been satisf^{ied}'d with so vulgar a tpe. The i^{deal} passion in *Isabella* is insipid, and even in *The Eve of St. Agnes* the passion, as express'd in stanzas xxxv-xxxix, is at best of a conventional tpe, and has to hav a good deal read into it b^y the l^{ight} of the story.

But Keats' doct^{rine} of beauty, which m^{ight} be defended if it was spiritual^{is}'d, which it never is b^y him, m^{ay} often be reconc^{il}'d with true feelin, b^y the all^{ow}ance which is due to his objectiv method; concernin, this, as illustrations hav been given (see pp. 89, 90), I shall say no more here except to repeat that Keats' imagery probably a^{lways} fol-

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

low'd, if it did not always clearly picture, some train of ideas; and when he says in the Ode To Fanny

My muse had wings,

And ever ready was to take her course

Whither I bent her force,

Unintellectual, yet divine to me;—

Divine, I say! What sea-bird o'er the sea

Is a philosopher the while he goes

Winging along where the great water throes?

these words should not be taken as a disavowal of meaning in 'those abstractions which were his only life', but as an apology for immaturity, and they must be interpreted in the light of his high idea of philosophy. Keats was conscious, Intellectual like Virgil, of a double inclination. He said of himself, Element April 1818:¹ 'I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious, and a love for philosophy. Were I calculated for the former, I should be glad; but as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter.' This would be a strange variant of

'Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ'

if we need suppose it to be anything more than an utterance of that contrarious mood so common to introspection; it is nevertheless evidence that Keats was unlikely to hav

¹Letters, l.

depreciated the intellectual element of his art: but the intellectual element is always in league with emotion, and would have been, I imagine, considered by him as worthless in poetry without such mixture. In the Epistle to Reynolds, analysed on p. 141, even the unpleasantness of the consideration of what we call the struggle for existence would, simply presented, have been flat and commonplace; but he shows it as a 'horrid mood', by which he is haunted, and uses great skill and a wealth of contrasted beauty in introducing it under this enhanced aspect, 'wreathing a flowery band spite of the unhealthy ways made for his searching'; and in calling his Muse unintellectual, he was no doubt uttering his reiterated impatience for more knowledge, the expression of which recurs so often in his poems and letters, that it is needless to quote any one, and which rises to a sort of consummation in the Revision of Hyperion, where it seems as if he had imagined himself to have at length attained to an insight of the mystery.

Earnest- There is less opposition, it seems to me, between Keats' **ness** true instinct for ideal philosophy and his luxurious poetry (which seems rather its young expression), than between these on the one hand and his practical human qualities, as revealed by his letters, on the other. The bond of all was an unbroken and unflagging earnestness, which is so utterly

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

unconscious and unobservant of itself as to be almost unmatch'd. It is always present in his poetry both for good and ill, in the spontaneous and felt quality of his epithets, and the absence of any barrier even, it would sometimes seem, of consideration or judgment between his mind and his pen. Whether this earnestness is the account of his failure in his purely comic freaks I do not know, but it may certainly account for his want of humour, for which, in spite of some traces in his letters, it does not appear to have left any room. The best of the letters are serious and full of good matter, a few are quite foolish, and a great number are written in a high-spirited jocular vein, which seems to be carelessly assumed for the double purpose of amusing his correspondent and relaxing his own mind. The chief charm in all of them is their unalloy'd sincerity: there is nothing between the pen and the mind, not always even an effort or desire to write what should be worth reading; it is enough that it is he that writes, and his brother or friend that will read.

In spite of this earnestness and philosophy, it is certainly true that Keats' mind was of a luxurious habit; and it must have been partly due to this temperament that he showed so little severity towards himself in the castigation of his poems, though that was, as I said before, chiefly

KEATS

caused by the prolific activity of his imagination, which was always providing him with fresh material to work on. In this respect he is above all poets an example of what is Inspiration meant by inspiration: the mood which all artists require, covet, and find most rare was the common mood with him; and I should say that, being amply supplied with this, what as an artist he most lacked was self-restraint and self-castigation,—which was indeed foreign to his luxurious temperament, unselfish and devoted to his art as he was,—the presence of which was most needful to watch, choose, and reject the images which crowded on him as he thought or wrote.

Milton And it is thus that Keats' best period was when he fell under the influence and example of Milton. He was a great deal influenced by other poets, and would reproduce not only the style of any writer whom he imitated, but the mental attitude which informed the style.¹ But it was not until he came to rival Milton's epic that his originality seemed to be in danger; and no one would think of judging Hyperion by its likeness to Paradise Lost. If the two poems should be generally compared, though it is plain that Keats does not reach the sustained sonority and force of

¹This is not true of his earliest work. But see, for example, the sonnet Time's Sea, which might have been written by Shakespeare.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Milton (nor has he even shown as much skill in characterising his divinities, whose elemental personalities would seem to have offered him a more interesting and poetically rich opportunity than the biblical devils did to Milton), yet in one respect he is in my opinion superior to Milton, for his descriptive touches are more sympathetic and less conventional. To give an example, where he describes Asia, he has

More thought than woe was in her dusky face,

For she was prophesying of her glory.

In my first edition I said that Milton would not have put in this epithet dusky. It happens that in *Paradise Regained* (iv. 76), where Milton is describing the

Embassies from Regions far remote

In various habits on the Appian road,

Or on the Æmilian,

he uses this very word of the Indians,

Dusk faces with white silken Turbants wreath'd,
and this, while it corrects my faulty analysis, well exhibits the difference which I wished to explain. In Milton dusk is the primary external distinction used as a sufficient description; in Keats dusky is secondary, and added on to the emotional expression of the face, and from that it takes a sympathetic warmth which is wholly absent in Milton.

KEATS

So fragmentary and incomplete a treatise may break off abruptly. I began it with a due sense, as I thought, of responsibility, and with full admiration for the poet: I find both increased at the end. I owe much to the kindness of friends, who have read my paper and offered suggestions; especially I may name Mrs. Margaret L. Woods, and my old friend Canon Dixon, whose remarks were of great service to me; but most of all I have to thank Mr. Ellis Woolbridge, without the promise of whose collaboration I should not have ventured on my task. In the qualitative analysis there is as much of his work as of my own, and I could not put my name to it without this acknowledgment.

If my criticism should seem sometimes harsh, that is, I believe, due to its being given in plain terms, a manner which I prefer, because by obliging the writer to say definitely what he means, it makes his mistakes easy to point out, and in this way the true business of criticism may be advanced; nor do I know that, in work of this sort, criticism has any better function than to discriminate between the faults and merits of the best art: for it commonly happens, when any great artist comes to be generally admired, that his faults, being graced by his excellences, are confounded with them in the popular judgment, and being easy of imitation, are the points of his work which are most liable to be copied.

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Keats has had some such imitators, and would, I imagin, hav been glad to be justifi'd from them. And if I hav read him rihtly, he would be pleased, coud he see it, at the universal recognition of his genius, and the utter rapt of its traducers; but much more moved, stirr'd he would be to the depth of his gratnature to know that he was understood, and that for the nobility of his character his name was loved and esteem'd.

YATTENDON, 1894.

R. B.

P.S.—The statement in the text that Keats began *Hyperion* in November 1818, and work'd at it as late as April 1819, finally discardin^g it in September 1819, is, I think, probable; but I do not wish it to be taken for more than an opinion. I hav not attempted to settle doubtful details of chronology, and do not wish to appear to hav done so.

I hav now, after twenty years, rev^{is}'d m^y Essay, correctin^g misprints, and some of m^y own mistakes, and I hav tri^e'd to amend the faultiest passages. I wish to thank the critics for their generous reception of m^y work, and for their valuable animadversions.

CHILSWELL, 1914.

Printed by John Johnson at the University Press, Oxford

Bridges : Collected Essays IV



833053

